



Holding My Breath

Sidura Ludwig

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In her beautifully wrought debut, *Holding My Breath*, author Sidura Ludwig crafts a bold yet tender coming-of-age tale of family, dreams, and the will to follow one's heart.

The only child of a Canadian pharmacist and his wife, Beth Levy grows up with the understanding that expectations can develop early in people's lives, "even before they are born." With that, the little girl senses a responsibility to become the narrator of her family's history, piecing together snippets of conversation, half-told stories, and intimations that waft throughout her Manitoba homestead—her aunt Carrie's resolve to never marry, her grandmother's static grief over her deceased husband, the wanderlust of her young and vivacious aunt Sarah, and the death of her uncle Phil during World War II.

But what she believes and what is true are as disparate as the three strong Jewish women that occupy Beth's house, life, and heart. Her mother, Goldie, the oldest sister, harbors a desire for social status that only results in a tacit disappointment, that nothing, not even her daughter, can assuage. Carrie, the middle one, possesses a gentle nature that masks a tragic countenance. The youngest, Sarah, still a teenager, stands poised to take on the world.

While Beth seeks out the nurturing comfort of Carrie, who keeps Uncle Phil's memory alive and bestows upon Beth his love of the stars and planets, it is the rebellious spirit of Sarah that most entices the girl. As Beth matures into a young woman, the combination of her aunts' influences pits the old world of her mother's strictures against a new one of exploration and escape. This internal conflict will force Beth to make a difficult choice.

With a voice as distinct as it is compelling, *Holding My Breath* celebrates the bonds of family and its reassuring traditions as it affirms the uniqueness of the individual on uncharted paths.

Holding My Breath Details

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From Reader Review Holding My Breath for online ebook

Vicki Cantwell says

Families and secrets. Families and stories. Do we build our stories about ourselves and our families on the stories that we are told? Or do we try to fill in the gaps that the secrets that we don't talk about leave?

This was a gentle book that built slowly and realistically. Even the ending made sense.

Gloria says

Beth Levy is an only child growing up with her aunts Carrie and Sarah almost as sisters. The story revolves around the three of them and Beth's mother Goldie and the young dreams they had and the lives they made for themselves. This is basically a coming of age tale nicely handled. Secrets hidden when Beth is a child are slowly revealed in a timely fashion. The narrative is smooth, and flows along quickly. A good summer read.

snishi says

Not particularly spectacular, but somehow hit the right spot when I read it. Not a difficult read; actually read it in one day.

Lila says

A touching story encompassing several generations of a Jewish family in Manitoba. Focuses on the women's struggle for independence and the right to pursue their dreams.

Shonna Froebel says

This book takes place in Winnipeg after World War II, and the characters are part of the Jewish community in the city. The narrator is Beth Levy, an only child. She grows up in a household where they are often other family members living, including her grandmother and aunts.

Beth's mother has aspirations to own a particular home and take a leading role in the Jewish community. Her aunt Carrie shares story of Beth's uncle Phil, who died in the war. Carrie alters clothes for women in the community, working out of the back room at Beth's father's pharmacy.

Beth's younger aunt, Sarah, is a rebel and a beauty. She doesn't follow what is expected of her and has dreams beyond their community. Beth is drawn to all of them for different reasons as she tries to find her own place, struggling against pressure to conform, but afraid to rebel too much. Beth is a clear voice here and the reader can see how she is influenced by the women around her.

Sandi Altner says

I grew up in Winnipeg so I appreciate the detail about locations and lifestyle in Sidura Ludwig's lovely coming of age novel. This is a gentle story with likable people you would be pleased to have as neighbours. It captures a time and community attitudes that ring true in a breezy set of snapshots of daily life. I like her style and hope she continues to publish additional books.

Sarah says

It was an okay book, and an easy read. I liked the relationship that she and Sarah had when she was young, and her connection to Uncle Phil. I also liked that although it was written in first person, she knew about other peoples thoughts and things that she wasn't around for, based on what she had been told after the fact. It was a good twist on first person.

What I didn't like was Aunt Sarah's eventual abandonment (I felt that it should have been wrapped up better: what is she up to now?) What came of her friends, especially the one in Japan: is she really happy there? And I wanted so badly for a reunion between Carrie and her son! Also, I love astronomy, so I wanted to see more of it! :)

Tahira says

There were some aspects of this novel that I liked and there were some descriptions of moments, settings, feelings and objects that I appreciated, but for the most part, I didn't feel as though it came together in the most cohesive way. Perhaps this is because I felt as though the timing of the novel was somewhat awkward and the development of the story did not follow a clearly structured path. I imagine this stems from the fact that the entirety of the novel was written after a short story which would one day become "Chapter 8", however, Chapter 8 does not come across quite as significant as the previous fact might suggest it was.

I think this novel could be a very good one, but I don't think the puzzles pieces came together as well as they could have.

Lisa says

Characters were well written. Quick read. A good story about family dynamics.

Susie says

2-1/2 stars. Interesting, but not gripping. I typically like 1st person narratives, but this one was a little much for me--projecting feelings and experiences about people before she was even born, for instance. If told from the 3rd person, it would have been believable. Don't particularly recommend.

Renee says

Spanning three decades against the backdrop of the Jewish community in the North End of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Holding My Breath is a coming of age novel that centers around a young girl named Beth Levy. Interesting, but not gripping---enjoyable but certainly not memorable.

Pooker says

This was a light and pleasant read. A good effort by a young, first-time novelist.

As a Winnipeg resident, it was delightful to be able to "place" everyone and their comings and goings on streets and locations familiar to me in and around the city.

It was also a personal (and perhaps peculiar) pleasure, as a non-Jew, to see certain Yiddish and Hebrew words in print. Having heard such words as Shabbos, shtetl, yichud, and yartzeit pronounced, I wouldn't have the foggiest idea how to spell them.

The story itself follows Beth, an only child, as she comes of age within her family, her extended family, the Jewish community in Winnipeg and the larger world and what she believes are their expectations of her. Beth is the self-proclaimed story-teller in her family. Her family's history though is rife with missing pieces, secrets, that Beth fills in with her own imagined version of the truth. As the "real" truths emerge, Beth must adjust her view of the people involved.

All of Ludwig's characters, their histories and situations are quite interesting and believable. I liked all of the characters in this story. In fact all of the characters in Beth's story were more interesting to me than Beth herself. Goldie and Saul, Beth's parents are hard working middle class Jews who want to do right. Saul works hard to support his family financially, to give them what they want and what the community expects of him. Goldie wants respectability in the community, a house on McAdam Street and four children. When Goldie's mother dies, Saul and Goldie become responsible for Goldie's younger sisters, Carrie and Sarah. By far it is these two aunts who are the most interesting. They know the family secrets and have secrets of their own. Sarah is wild and rebellious and beautiful. She wants to really live her life. Carrie is gentler, kinder and seems to be protector of all of the family members and their secrets, including her own. As a child, Beth adored her aunts.

There is something missing from this story for me. The problem is with Beth. She is, as she readily admits, an ordinary girl. She wins no prizes in any department although is well aware that her mother longs to have her do so, so that she can boast to the other mothers. It is not that Beth is uninteresting to me (she aspires to be an astronomer - an interest ignited by and shared by her deceased uncle Phil) but I was not emotionally invested in her. And I think that is because Beth's responses to the revealing of the family secrets is not the emotional, conflictual angst that I would expect. She accepts things in a matter-of-fact, black and white, somewhat juvenile sort of way. Granted young people of her age often do see things in black and white, right and wrong. Yet I wanted more from her. I had a difficult time accepting that she could go from adoring Sarah to total rejection and disinterest in her. I suppose though that this is consistent with Beth being the story teller and not the life of the story.

In all this is a readable and graceful story that I was happy to have read.

Lisa Lesyshen says

This is a lovely story that I loved. I am not sure why I liked it so much but it was written beautifully and the story was compelling yet simple. This is her first novel.

Lee says

My favourite bookshop is the Waterstones in Birmingham; the one housed in the old building that used to be bank. This book was published by Tindel Street Press, a local Publishing house in Birmingham, and i bought and read most of them that had a special display in the store. All the characters had life breathed into them by Ludwig and it holds a place still on my bookshelf. Theres nothing sensational about the story, and like the cold snow of the town, the pace is measured, but the characters drew me in.

Alan says

Sidura was in a writer's group with me for a while in the early noughties. She wrote a story called 'Holding My Breath Underwater' there which became a chapter in this well written book. She's gone back to Canada now but came over last year for the British launch of this title. This is set in Winnipeg, a family/growing up book which as Margaret Forster says on the cover is a 'pleasure to read'.
